

A Study on Economic and Agricultural Development during the Timurid Dynasty from the Perspective of Civilizational Exchanges

Nuliya Keremu¹

¹ Institute of Central Asian Studies, Shaanxi Normal University, Xi'an, Shaanxi 710062, China

ABSTRACT

This paper explores the economic and agricultural development during the Timurid Dynasty from the perspective of civilizational exchange theory. The research indicates that the Timurid regime promoted the prosperity of economy and agriculture through measures such as improving the postal station system, relocating skilled craftsmen, and constructing irrigation projects. At the same time, the integration of nomadic and agricultural civilizations, the influence of Persian civilization, and the prosperity of Silk Road trade collectively facilitated the development of civilization in Central Asia.

Keywords: *Timurid Dynasty, Economic and agricultural development, Civilizational exchanges.*

1. INTRODUCTION

On April 10, 1370, the 34-year-old Timur ascended to the throne in Balkh, declaring himself Emir. He announced that he was the heir and successor of Genghis Khan and Chagatai. This year can be regarded as the founding year of the Timurid Dynasty. The Timurid Dynasty (1370-1507), as one of the main carriers of Central Asian medieval civilization, experienced historical changes that were largely synchronous with the evolution of Central Asian medieval civilization. Material civilization, which consists of material production activities and their labor outcomes, is one of the fundamental contents of human civilizational exchanges. The type of exchange involves material exchange activities mediated by material relationships such as production materials, tools, products, capabilities, activities, and the individuals themselves. [1] Therefore, trade-based socio-economic activities were the core content of the material civilization exchanges of the Timurid Dynasty. Since its establishment in the 14th century, the dynasty's socio-economy has undergone significant changes. The collision and interaction between nomadic and agricultural civilizations, along with the differentiation of power and changes in rulers' policies, gradually transformed the warfare interactions of the Timurid period into

peaceful exchanges. Shahrukh moved the capital of the dynasty from Samarkand to Herat, and the impact of Persian civilization became a major factor in the socio-economic development of the khanate.

Civilizational exchanges are a bidirectional or multidirectional process of interaction. Civilizations influence and permeate each other while also experiencing conflicts and struggles; their normal state is a relative static balance and dynamic balance. [1] The wars initiated by Timur, although bringing plunder and destruction, were also accompanied by large-scale irrigation projects (such as the irrigation of the Mughan Plain, the construction of canals in the Kabul Valley and Khorasan), the building of bridges, the restoration of old roads and the paving of new ones, as well as extensive urban construction (such as the establishment of markets and craft workshops, palaces, mosques, religious schools, etc.). [2] These measures led to a series of changes in the economic sector of the dynasty, with nomads gradually transitioning to a settled lifestyle and an accelerated process of urbanization. After Timur unified the surrounding regions, he relocated local craftsmen to Samarkand, which brought about a diversification of architectural styles and further development in urban planning. Handicrafts flourished as a result,

and the peaceful foreign policy implemented by Shahrukh also facilitated trade exchanges with neighboring countries, thereby promoting the prosperity of the dynasty's economy.

2. THE DEVELOPMENT OF TRADE

Timur paid great attention to the development of trade in the dynasty, as trade was crucial for the national treasury. In the capital Samarkand, there are many textile warehouses, and this city is also a center for spice sales. According to Spanish ambassador Clavijo, similar spices could not even be found in Alexander's shops. The dynasty imported leather from Dasht-i-Kapchak and Mongolian territories, silk from China, and diamonds, rubies, and other gemstones from Khotan. Timur attempted to transform his capital into a perfect model through trade. [3]

During Timur's rule, trade relations between Central Asia and China were good. Although political relations had once deteriorated, trade continued. Clavijo pointed out that several months before their arrival in Samarkand, a caravan of 800 camels brought a large quantity of goods from China. In early 1409, a group of envoys came from China to express condolences. In 1412, another group of envoys arrived in Herat. The Chinese emperor expressed in a letter his hope to open trade routes and ensure the safety of merchants conducting business. In 1417, the envoys from China arrived in Samarkand, Andijan, Herat, and Isfahan, bringing with them falcons, silk, brocade, Chinese paper, porcelain, a portrait of a horse painted by a Chinese artist, and a letter addressed to Shah Rukh, the prince, and his wife. [4] In 1419, the Ming Dynasty once again wrote letters in Persian, Chagatai, and Chinese, expressing the desire to promote trade, and sent similar gifts to the Timurid Dynasty.

During the reign of Shahrukh, the trade routes between India and Egypt were very secure and widely used, which made the country more developed and prosperous. After the death of Shahrukh, the accession of Abu-Said revitalized Herat, restoring its former glory. Despite facing financial issues, Abu-Said, upon the advice of Sheikh Ubayd Allah Alyar of the Naqshbandi order, did not abolish the trade tax known as *tamgā*. When he learned of any abuse of power, he would impose severe punishments. As Herat became a trade center, the economy of the dynasty further flourished.

3. THE DEVELOPMENT OF HANDICRAFTS

The development of handicrafts during the Timurid Dynasty benefited from the prosperity of urban and household handicrafts. Borodin, in his book "The Starry Sky of Samarkand", describes in detail the markets of medieval Samarkand: 'The tents were opened, and deep within the tents burst forth silk or copper plates, the works of carpenters, painted saddles, fluffy scrolls on heavy carpets, and golden lace on bracelets and necklaces. 'From the Iron Gate to Timur's blue palace, the winding streets were filled with thousands of shops. Each row has its own goods, carved doors or furs, household textiles or pottery, pottery jars from potters or purple Samarkand velvet, products from blacksmiths or painters.' He paid particular attention to the armorer: 'The armorer's workshop was open, and swords or spears lay quietly there like bundles of brushwood, along with piles of helmets, some polished, made of steel or iron, and even silver helmets, with engraved edges or golden and black inscriptions.' [5]

During the Timur era, crafts related to the use of fire saw significant development, especially iron smelting, blacksmithing, jewelry making, glass, and pottery workshops. There were also many workshops related to the production and processing of iron, as well as the manufacturing of military equipment. In his foreign policy, Timur relied on information provided by his officials—who acted as informants sent to all neighbouring and distant countries in the capacity of merchants and caravan leaders—to make balanced decisions. He once wrote: 'The art of conquering nations is like a game of chess to me.' He placed particular emphasis on the development of trade and economic relations, especially the development of the Silk Road. [6]

Due to the rapid development of town trade and artisan product production in Transoxiana and Khorasan, the social and industrial differentiation of the population further deepened. New markets and caravans formed, and specialized trading houses, workshops, and stores expanded. Due to the growth of domestic demand and the influence of trade and economic relations between Central Asia and China, India, Iran, West Asia, and Russia, the production range and quantity of timber, leather, jewelry, paper and pottery products, semi-silk and silk textiles, agricultural products, and their processed goods have greatly enriched, and the geographical scope of textile production has significantly expanded. Research indicates that the

silk weaving household handicrafts, which served as the foundation for capitalist factories in the Transoxiana and Khorasan regions, were not introduced from external sources—such as China and West Asia—but were instead indigenous and a product of local development.

4. THE DEVELOPMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Timur's successors were keen on construction, and their golden age of rule brought all arts, including architecture, to new heights. During the Timurid era, they built schools and monasteries in cities, including Herat, which became fertile ground for poets, musicians, calligraphers, painters, and others. [7] Shahrukh was the founder of the Herat school, which began in 1414 and was completed in 1434. He was resourceful, constructive, and a supporter of various arts. The grand religious school in Herat can rival the largest Timurid buildings in Samarkand in terms of scale and magnificence. In addition, Sultan Husayn Bayqara also constructed many buildings in the city of Herat, including the Jahanara Garden and the palace within the garden, which took over 20 years to complete. Shahrukh encouraged the development of architects, masons, and craftsmen.

Timur placed great importance on agricultural development, expanding arable land in the wide oases of Transoxiana (especially in the Zarepshan Valley) and developing irrigation systems. In addition, during this period, the development of trade and handicrafts in the Mavlavi region was particularly prominent, along with both internal and external trade with Russia, Tatarstan, and China. Timur ensured the safety of trade routes, especially the Silk Road.

The renowned scientist I.M. Muminov praised Timur's contributions to the history and people of Transoxiana at that time. As early as the Soviet regime, the government held a negative attitude towards Timur's contributions, but Muminov wrote and published a work titled "The Role and Status of Timur in Central Asian History." [8] In 1968, at the initiative of Muminov, the book "Temur Tuzuklari" was published in Uzbek. He described Timur as an outstanding strongman, a politician favored in the difficult historical realities of Central Asia at the time, who successfully led the empire towards gradual economic development and prosperity.

The most important creative activities during Timur's reign were the measures he took regarding

irrigation, agriculture, the relationship between the agricultural sector and urban development. Particularly noteworthy is his attention to the development of urban and rural life, handicrafts, trade, and trade routes, as well as the measures taken to promote the development of architecture, art, science, and literature. All of this enables us to reconstruct the history of Central Asia over hundreds of years and to more clearly present the specific circumstances of social and economic life during the reign of Emir Timur and the Timurid Dynasty.

Timur's role in the productivity and economic development of the empire is also reflected in his support for representatives of peaceful and creative professions in the conquered territories, which ensured the development of material production in agriculture, handicrafts, trade, urban construction, and improvements, as well as advancements in science and culture. Under his rule, people actively repaired cities, established new ones, built bridges, roads, and irrigation systems, and vigorously developed science, painting, secular and religious education.

Timur implemented measures to revitalize and develop agriculture, improve the production relations of agriculture, which served as the main sector of livelihood and source of income for the people, and strengthen the food supply for the army. Timur successfully addressed economic issues: he undertook extensive repairs of the irrigation facilities that had been destroyed during the Mongol rule, thereby creating conditions to better meet the growing demands of the people. He effectively resolved related issues in practice to implement his requirements. Particularly noteworthy are the measures taken by Timur to restore the agricultural culture of the Central Asian oases, irrigation projects, the construction of major canals, ditches, dams, reservoirs, the regulation of water supply systems for urban and rural settlements, land development, planting techniques and cultural crops, and the development of horticulture.

5. CONCLUSION

The economic and agricultural development of the Timurid Dynasty not only shaped its own prosperity but also profoundly influenced the civilizational progress of Central Asia. The dynasty successfully achieved the transition from a nomadic economy to a settled economy by improving infrastructure, promoting innovations in handicrafts,

and advancing agricultural technologies. At the same time, although Timur's expansionist policies brought about short-term conflicts and destruction, they objectively facilitated the exchange and integration between different civilizations, injecting new vitality into the cultural diversity and social progress of the Central Asian region.

Moreover, the economic development model of the Timurid Dynasty provides important historical lessons for future generations. Its experiences in infrastructure construction, technological innovation, and civilizational integration not only promoted the long-term development of the Central Asian region but also offered valuable case studies for researching the relationship between cross-cultural exchange and economic progress. The historical experiences of the Timurid Dynasty indicate that civilizational interactions are not only a driving force for economic development but also an important impetus for social progress.

REFERENCES

- [1] Peng Shuzhi, Theory of Civilized Interaction, Xi'an: Shaanxi People's Publishing House, 2002, p.502.
- [2] A. Yakubovsky, Samarkand under Timur and the Timurids, Leningrad: Publishing House of the Academy of Sciences of the USSR, 1933.p.35.
- [3] Clavijo, Ruy Gonzalez de, Embassy to Tamerlane, translated by Guy le Strange, London: Routledge 1928, p.190-191.
- [4] Hafiz-i Abru, op. cit, f. 539r; 547r; Samarqandi, op. cit., p.354-355.
- [5] Borodin S. Stars over Samarkand. Tashkent: Uzbekistan, 1981, pp. 16-18.
- [6] Mukhammedov M.M., Aslanova D.H., "Economic policy of Amir Timur and the development of the productive forces of Uzbekistan in the era of the Timurid rule"[J]. Problems of Modern Science and Education, 2020, No 5 (150), p.39
- [7] Nawai, A. H, Tarih va Jahan az Mughul ta Qajarya, Tehran: Homa Publishers, 1985, p.96.
- [8] Ibrohim Mo'minov. The Place and Role of Amir Temur in the History of Central Asia, Tashkent: Fan, 1968, p.116.